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United States Senate
COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6050

March 14, 2019

The Honorable Michael Enzi
Chairman, Committee on the Budget
United States Senate
624 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Bernie Sanders
Ranking Member, Committee on the Budget
United States Senate
624 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Enzi and Ranking Member Sanders:

In accordance with your request, I am submitting my views and estimates regarding defense spending for your consideration as you prepare the Fiscal Year (FY) 2020 Senate Budget Resolution.

As Chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee I write in support of the President's budget request of \$750 billion for national defense in FY 2020. I understand the challenges the Senate Budget Committee faces each year in crafting an annual budget and balancing the many competing priorities and interests. I too share the concern of many members of the Senate about the nation's growing debt. The Congressional Budget Office projects that by 2029 our nation's debt will be 93 percent of our gross domestic product (GDP), which is driven by an ever growing deficit caused by unsustainable, domestic mandatory programs. This is a trend that, if not addressed, will have negative impacts on the strength of our economy and jeopardize our national security.

However, cutting defense spending is not the solution to our debt problem. It has long been documented that the driver of our debt is mandatory spending, rather than discretionary spending. Absent addressing the growth in mandatory spending first and foremost, reductions to defense spending will have little impact on the debt. More importantly, cutting defense spending at this critical time will have profound impacts on our security, prosperity, and place in the world. Simply put, attempting to reduce our national debt on the back of the defense budget will exacerbate our current national security crisis, while doing little to address the debt.

The Commission on the National Defense Strategy, a bipartisan body tasked with reviewing the 2018 National Defense Strategy, believes that we are facing a crisis of national security. The commission stated that today "the security and wellbeing of the United States are at greater risk than at any time in decades." Further, that "America's ability to defend its allies, its

partners, and its own vital interests are increasingly in doubt,” because the United States may “struggle to win, or perhaps lose, a war against China or Russia.” The impacts of this change in the global balance of power will impact more than just the men and women in uniform. As the guarantor of stability and freedom of the global commons, U.S. military superiority is intrinsically linked to our prosperity.

We find ourselves in this situation today because of mistakes made in the past decade. Under the Obama administration, total defense spending dropped from \$657 billion to \$585 billion. These spending reductions occurred while our service men and women were actively engaged in Afghanistan and Iraq. Asking our military to fight two wars with shrinking budgets produced a readiness crisis that put the lives of our service members at greater risk.

During this time, the Department of Defense also delayed major modernization that would have been necessary to compete against strategic competitors. The Obama administration’s diplomacy—backed by hope rather than strength—did little to counter China’s global ambitions. And it dismissed the threat from Putin’s Russia as political fear-mongering. However, both China and Russia were making significant investments in their military, specifically aimed at neutralizing U.S. advantages. Year by year, our adversaries’ capabilities raced forward while we stood still. Senior military leaders believe the U.S. is losing both its qualitative and quantitative advantage. Unfortunately, in some important instances, our competitors have surpassed U.S. capabilities.

Fortunately, we have begun to recognize the challenges we face, and have taken initial steps to confront them. The Trump administration—through its National Security Strategy and the National Defense Strategy—has acknowledged that the United States is engaged in strategic competitions with both China and Russia, and that the stakes for our security and prosperity must not be underestimated. Increases to defense spending in fiscal year 2018 and 2019 have marked the foundational steps to compete effectively with China and Russia and to restore our comparative military advantage. But this is only the beginning. We must continue this effort if we are to achieve the urgent change at significant scale that is required. While money alone will not fix the problems, we cannot ensure military superiority without it.

The military must recapitalize its force after nearly two decades of combat in the Middle East. And we have to reimagine, reshape, and resize our military to confront the challenges of strategic competition with China and Russia. Most of the weapon systems procured during the Reagan era are simply too old and need to be replaced. Our nuclear weapons, the best deterrent against nuclear powers, must be modernized to ensure their effectiveness. Greater investments must be made for research and development of key technologies that we’ve neglected like hypersonic weapons, long-range fires, cruise and missile defense, and artificial intelligence. All of these efforts, will require additional money.

Former Secretary of Defense James Mattis and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Dunford testified that in order to implement the new National Defense Strategy, the defense budget needed a sustained 3-5% real growth. This recommendation was also made by the Commission on the National Defense Strategy. The President’s budget request of \$750

billion also reflects the need for real growth in the defense budget. Simply put, if the United States is going to face two near-peer threats, both with significantly advanced militaries, then the U.S. military must grow and rebuild its capabilities. That cannot be done with a flat budget.

Furthermore, I must stress the urgency for which Congress must reach a budget agreement. If the past is any indication, absent a budget agreement the federal government will be operating on short-term continuing resolutions and possibly even sequestration. This uncertainty in budgets and appropriations creates significant waste within the government and makes cost-saving efforts futile. Even worse, if sequestration is not averted, much of the gains the military has made over the last two years will be squandered. Rather than conduct business as usual, we must find a way to pass a two-year budget deal early in the year that will pave the way for on-time authorization and appropriations bills. In this era of renewed strategic competition, passing on-time appropriations must be considered a matter of national security that will directly impact the ability of the United States to compete effectively with China and Russia.

In closing, I believe the topline requested in the President's Budget Request for Fiscal Year 2020 is the correct level of funding for defense. The Commission on National Defense Strategy stated that "[t]here must be greater urgency and seriousness in funding national defense." I agree. The military will fail in deterring China and Russia without sustained higher levels of defense spending, and the repercussions to our country's prosperity and way of life will be tragic.

Sincerely,



James M. Inhofe

Chairman